MUSKINGHAM VALLEY
October 19, 1997

Good to be back home in Ohio

Good associations, friendships ...

Muskingham College

College of Wooster – 2 grads,

and enormous respect.

Congratulations on your 25th Anniversary.

I love it – only Presbyterians would celebrate a reorganization and a restructuring.

I love the Presbyterian Church – always have, since childhood.

where folk know that Corn Knows Corn to Sing is really Carmen Ohio

where we know what Sat afternoon is about

Tom Osborne Nebraska

- always sell-out
- looked up – empty
- elderly woman
- whose seat is that.
- My husband
- Why isn't he here
- he died
- give to our
- This friends –
- of they're all
- Oh no – they're all at his funs!

Some celebrate the liberation of the nation defeat of enemy birth of the King

Only Presby – a restructuring.

B.A. Presbyterian Church gave me my sense of the transcendent

-- The community

-- Told me the story of Jesus

-- And slowly introduced me to something marvelous –

a larger family

-- Camp ~~Shiknish~~ Shekinah

I was thrilled to learn that because of ~~BAPC~~ I was part of Huntington Presbytery / Synod of PA. Presbyterians all over the country working together. . .

For 34 years I have loved being part of this great tradition/church.

I've loved its commitment to the world and involvement in issues.

I've loved its self consciousness – its willingness to debate the issues even when I don't agree with its conclusions.

I've loved its commitment to education – children and higher education.

I've loved its community of scholars.

And I love it for continuing to take the world seriously by discussing the most critical and controversial issues of our day – sexuality – and responsible, faithful behavior that reflect the mind and Spirit of Christ.

And so I hurt when we start to talk about dividing the church – ideologically.

And when someone says we are a very sick church,

Or when good, authentic, faithful brothers and sisters in Christ are ridiculed and maligned and their credibility – along with their peace of mind – is intentionally destroyed – because of their opinions – their faith positions.

And I think it is supremely naïve to conclude – so simplistically – that we are in a post-denominational age: so we can just all go our own way while the Spirit creates a new thing.

Although I do believe we are not very good at listening to the Spirit and we do hold too tightly to the past, and women/men, I believe the last 7 words of the church will be – "We never did it that way before."

I'm not proposing an uncritical love for the church, nor an idolizing of its unity – not at all.

I am a perhaps too proud son of the Reformation for that.

→ 2 hr. mtg w/ Pontifical Secretariat re Xian Unity
Special Guests at audience; introduced to crowd, brought greetings to Pope +

In Rome – in front of the Basilica of St. Peter – greeting the Pope – I had two feelings:

-- awe at the global scope of the church and its rich history

-- and gratitude for my Presbyterian/ Reformed tradition.

So – no uncritical love for church. In fact – more like a lover's quarrel.

Good precedent –

C.S. Lewis – Screwtape Letters, Wormwood and Screwtape:

Wormwood's assigned to turn —
a new convert —

"My Dear Wormwood,

I note with grave displeasure that your patient has become a Christian.... There is no need to despair; hundreds of these adult converts have been reclaimed after a brief sojourn in the Enemy's camp and are now with us...

One of our great allies at present is the Church itself. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean the Church as we see her spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners. That, I confess, is a spectacle which makes our boldest tempters uneasy. But fortunately it is quite invisible to these humans. All your patient sees is the half-finished, sham Gothic erection on the new building estate. When he goes inside, he sees the local grocer with rather an oily expression on his face bustling up to offer him one shiny

"These things in the Presbyterian Church , their contentions and janglings are so ridiculous, so wicked, so outrageous, that no doubt there is a jubilee in hell every year, about the time of the meeting of the General Assembly. And if there were tears in heaven, no doubt they would be shed over the difficulties of the Presbyterian Church."

Sometimes the fights become harsh – the fear going to Albuquerque was that we might split.

I.e., church reflects Culture War – the ideological fault line dividing the society in which people who differ become foes:

little book containing a liturgy which neither of them understands, and one shabby little book containing corrupt texts of a number of religious lyrics, mostly bad, and in very small print. When he gets to his pew and looks round him he sees just that selection of his neighbours whom he has hitherto avoided. You want to lean pretty heavily on those neighbours. Make his mind flit to and fro between an expression like "the body of Christ" and the actual faces in the next pew."

Sometimes a meeting can do that to us.

* * *

Charles Finney 1835 Lectures on Revivals of Religion

The first to have a lover's quarrel was St. Paul.

Two years ago we were asked to study 1 Corinthians. I did

TO PAGE 5

Good precedent (lovers' quarrel – C.S. Lewis, Screwtape Letters)

Sounds like lovers' quarrel – all these people living with the church but clearly energized by anger with it.

But first was St. Paul – whole church asked to read his first letter to Corinthians.

I did –

Chapter one "must have been written last week – for us."

We hear 1 Cor., 13th Chapter mostly on Saturday afternoon at 2:30 – actually 2:37 – 5:37 during a wedding.

Not about marriage at all, but a church fight. Circa 50AD.

There they were, precariously perched – ignorant, ridiculed – and instead of tending to business they close up sides and had a fight … an embarrassingly public fight.

Some said, "I belong to Apollos (intellectuals)" – a philosopher: others – "I belong to Peter (the conservatives)," others, "Paul (the liberals)," others Jesus: "We have the real thing." All the rest of you are wrong, maybe heretical, outside the boundaries of orthodoxy.

Paul wrote, "Is Christ divided? I appeal to you that all be in agreement – that there be no

divisions among you – that you be united in the same mind and same purpose."

Two years ago at Wichita – "Theology Matters."

Last year – "Mission Matters."

This year – "Church Matters."

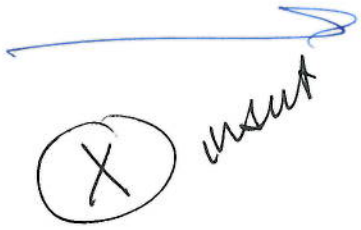
You and I belong to an old church. Here before the nation: helped to form it – supported the Revolution – helped write its constitution.

We have shared issues – split over slavery – sexuality.

We are a big church:

- 2.7 million members
- 11,400 congregations
- 68 colleges

- **Mission in 87 countries**
- **110,000,000 budget**



We are a distinguished _____church and once a year we get together.

[Cuba, Brazil, Chile, Croatia, Zaire/Rwanda, E. Africa, Sudan, Korea]

A Presbyterian General Assembly is a wonderful event, not unlike a family reunion.

Reunions too are annual, no more frequently – for good reasons. It's great to be together, but not for too long! It doesn't take long for you to know why you only meet yearly. Some of the family are a little different. Families are diverse: eccentric aunt, frenetic nuclear families, lively singles, noisy teenagers. Some

We are distinguished Missionary Church

~~PAGE 8A INSERT~~

Mission stories –

Memorable:

- **First Presbyterian Church - Havana, Hector Hernandez**
- **First Presbyterian Church - Community Center - Fortaleza - Barrio - children with cups**
- **Croatia, Ocijek**
  - **Vinkovsci**
  - **Evangelical Seminary - Steve and Michele Kurtz -**
    - **Agape, Peter Kuzmic**
    - **Antol Bolaq**

particularly violent attacks, public bldgs. RC Cathedral Orth. .. Ref. Andre Laugh direct hit

See Page 6 Sermon Unity?

- Korea
  - Schools/hospitals
    - Evangelism in service
    - North Korea - 500 churches
    - ~~Insik Kim~~

We are an old – big – distinguished missionary church and we are badly divided.

1996 208th Amendment B – Fidelity - Chastity

1997 209th Amendment A – Fidelity - Integrity

Many had hoped the issue would be resolved and we can move on.

Many want desperately for us to move on. I do.

But – we are divided.

Presbytery vote for B was ~~decision~~.

Reality is that the division was almost equal: 50.6 – 49.4 -- and the fact is that the issue of sexual orientation and sexual behavior will not go away after B – or A – or whatever comes next.

Fact remains that Presbyterians of integrity and faith differ on this one, and so, this issue becomes – is this particular issue the one on which we are willing to stake the future of our church?

Some are saying yes.

I say no. I wonder why we can't agree to disagree; respect diversity and difference and hold on to one another.

Whether we can or can't will have a lot to do with how we conduct the conversation.

Can we do it with civility, courtesy, love?

We are in a culture war.
Discussion becomes attack -
Dialogue → contention
People who differ look like enemies
Opponents are demonized
~~Moderator's~~ Moderate respect for diversity looks like weakness.

How can we get through this? Jack Rogers suggests a moratorium – stand down and continue the conversation which actually just began.

We are still generating resources and energy.

Kathleen Norris in Christian Cult?

"In our ideological age, making room, especially for those who disagree with us, is a dangerous thing to do."

Kathleen Norris suggests that these complex matters won't be resolved legislatively. And I wonder if she isn't right, i.e., that we Presbyterians – with our Book of Order – want to reduce it all to resolution, policy, amendment to our constitution.

Kathleen Norris: "We might explore ways in which poetic intelligence could be of use to churches that seem to be in danger of becoming just one more place in our society where people become polarized over political issues."

So what if we reclaimed our oldest tradition?

A community of praise and celebration.

We begin at worship/table -- and we distinguish ourselves by our love and service.

Could we?

We have important work to do and I have high hopes --

SEE PAGE 18

My hope and vision is based on the notion that we are a reformed church, a church that understands that reformation and creative engagement within the culture is the tradition.

Motto of the Reformers –
"Reformanda (?) – Semper Reformata"
reformed and always being reformed – in accordance with scripture and in engagement with the world.

My hope for our church is that we will always remember that church is not static, but always changing – remember that we are a reforming church. We began when an individual, under the compelling call of God, reimagined the church for the 16th century.

Max Depree(?) – leadership jazz(?) only organizations that will survive/thrive are those that learn to initiate and manage change from within the organization itself – "leaders are accountable for the continuous renewal of this organization."

And that we will acknowledge that reimagining and reformation is already happening – as energy shifts and relocates from national structures to congregations and as new challenges and configurations and requirements present themselves to us.

A reality – a shift in energy and money from national to local .... Presbynet reported Youngil Cho's remarks: he speaks directly – we can wait – or we can try to be creative.

I have seven ideas. I hope that we can and will:

1) Reinvent Church: We have a model that doesn't work everywhere –

Urban and rural: decline – old model doesn't work.

The dilemma. Heavily invested in real estate – no longer in right place: building designed to serve a different era – a sociological configuration that doesn't exist any longer. Declining resources; rising expenses

The response: one, at least, Commissioned lay pastors is an attempt. Jim Capps – retired cattle rancher in Oregon – lay pastor of several

little churches that are thriving under his leadership.

We need new forms of "church" ... looser, not tied to expensive buildings. See CWL

2) NCD and church growth (handwringing for 35 years) mostly trying to find someone to blame: we're not having enough babies; we're not starting enough new churches – Luidens: seismic population shifts ... nay sayers will not accept non-judgment _____.

Need 100-150 (one per presbytery annually.

Southern Baptist and Assembly of God are having more babies and starting more congregations.

New ways to do it ?

Collaboration between GA, Synod, Presbytery and congregations.

3) Communication: an every home publication. We don't do it very well.

Most of what folk know comes from people who want to change it

"take it back"

as if it were being held captive by hostile forces

4) ~~Higher Education~~ – a natural for us. Mulder et al suggest relationship between member declines and change in relationship with colleges and attitude about higher education and campus ministries.

- **Colleges**
- **Campus ministries**
- **Moderator's Forum**

5) Global Mission

We have a distinguished tradition in 87 countries – faithful witness – cite Global Ministry E. Europe, Croatia, AGAPE project – Bosnia, Croatia, Herzegovenia.

Cuba.

Zaire – Kasai: 30 villages destroyed

Brazil/Chile/Argentina [Reformation celebration sponsored by the Grandmother-Mother-Daughter]

Eastern Europe

Soviet Union/Russia – New nations emerging – new possibilities as churches emerge from oppression.

6) Reclaim our commitment to be a racially inclusive church in a racially inclusive society.

Church burnings: a wake-up call and an opportunity. Cite trip: Cliff Kirkpatrick, Curtis Kearns, Pam Worthy, Larry Hill, Matthews Murkland Presbyterian Church, "God didn't provoke, but will use."

7) To be a Biblical church – body of Christ – that attempts to model and live like Jesus, who dined with Pharisees and prostitutes, rich and poor, pious and sinners.

- inclusive
- attention to the marginalized
- love for world
- hopeful

And one more,

8) Rebuild Trust

It is our first and most critical priority. If we can't do this, all the rest is simply talk. If we can't – or won't – trust one another, we might as well fold our tents as a connected church. How? Well, how about we just do it? How about we "just say yes to one another."

My mail – we'll never trust until "they earn it." My family would have been a disaster: I'm glad we risked trusting because we loved those kids. God's love isn't based on our trustworthiness. You trust by deciding to.

How about we declare a cease-fire in the cultural war that is raging within the church, a general amnesty.

Turn down the volume. Stop maligning individuals, calling faith, integrity into question.

Liberals and conservatives are not enemies, but brothers and sisters who differ – but who are united in their faith in Jesus Christ and commitment to his church and devotion to the work of his Kingdom.

I call our whole church to repent, not only of our sins, but of demonizing members of our own family – to reach out to one another in the spirit of the apostle who, addressing himself to a divided church, wrote, "I will show you a more excellent way." "If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or clanging cymbal.

And then went on …

"Love is patient; love is kind; love does not insist on its own way." What if we became literalists about that ~~crux~~ phrase.

This church of ours is a precious gift. Those of us who are ordained promised in our ordination to further its "peace, unity and purity.

NOTE: Not unity after we have peace and purity – ~~agreement~~ – but central to the entire prize is something we are given.

Wouldn't it be something if we actually did that – actually loved one another enough to show the world what unity, with diversity, looks like.

Showed the world the transforming power of a Gospel that turns ideological opponents into brothers and sisters who can't stop loving one another and enjoying one another and praying for one another and caring for one another and protecting one another and standing up for one another.

Why, if we did that, the world might find us interesting, might pay attention instead of ignoring us as a declining, rigid, moralistic little sect consumed by its own bickering. Why if we showed the world the power of love the world might, as our Lord once intimated, even ask or demand to know the secret of this amazing, transforming power. Wouldn't it be something if the whole church were free to love as radically and inclusively as Jesus all the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), NCC, National

Association of Evangelicals, PLC, the Witherspoon Society. Pro-Choice Voices, PFR, Semper Reformanda, of Scottie -.

I wear the cross – the idea was Harrison Ray Anderson's, one of my predecessors. Harrison Ray Anderson worked for unity, reunion. His great grandfather (1861) made motion – traveling – with money donated by Japanese Congregation. Iona – 2 crosses – one for each Moderator. A third one added later. In 1958 the first step. In 1983, 122 years after split, 4 years after his death -- 3 crosses joined in Atlanta. Memorable/thrilling occasion of healing, renewal and hope.

HRA ~

~~1926~~ Minutes.

This church is precious. It is our privilege to serve it for awhile – to sing with that great

chorus which has been praising God before we joined it and will go on after we are gone . . . to strengthen it, and then hand it on to our children and grandchildren.

Thank you for all you do for your faith in Jesus Christ and for the hope you hold for the future.

Church Matters. Your congregations – this Presbytery . . Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) – the Holy Catholic Church – the church of Jesus Christ.

A NEW GREATNESS

10-19-97

The single best line from an American motion picture this past year was when an aspiring professional athlete bellows to his hassled agent, "Show me the money!" I was on an airplane, having exhausted all the reading material in my briefcase and the seat back compartment, including evacuation instructions in case of an emergency water landing, so I turned to the movie. "Show me the money!" I loved it. I took out my notebook and wrote. October 19. Stewardship Sunday. Show me the money!

The fact is, we don't say it that directly here, in church. The fact is, we will go to great

lengths not to say it that directly. The fact is, we have a whole ecclesiastic vocabulary of euphemisms to avoid saying it directly.

A Princeton University sociologist observed recently that while modern Americans are quite willing apparently to talk openly about the details of their sex lives, their bodily ailments, even their own deaths, when it comes to their money, a protective "cloud of secrecy" descends on the conversation.

Ministers generally don't like to preach about money, will do anything to avoid asking for it, will sometimes act as if we don't understand it or care about it, even though historian Charles Beard says that our nation's history is best understood by looking at it through the lens of economics, and even though we have come to describe our common life in this nation as a marketplace.

There is, however, a growing literature which is taking us to task for our shyness about money. Presbyterian theologian Robert Wood Lynn went from teaching at Union Theological Seminary in New York City to the Lilly Endowment as director of the division which deals with and makes grants to religious institutions and causes. Lynn discovered that in that world, religion was ill-informed, unsophisticated and falling far behind everybody else in our culture. And so, after leaving Lilly, he is now focusing his considerable abilities on helping churches and church people think and talk creatively and intelligently and intelligibly about money. Lynn and Wuthnow plead with us to stop using euphemisms and simply say it.

When the old European churches re-invented themselves in the new world with its

commitment to non-established religion, which meant the state would not fund religion from tax revenues, they had a problem: how to pay the bills. Lynn suggests that one of the most efficient ideas the church came up with was pew rentals. In a market economy, why not sell seats in church? The best seats go for the highest price, cheap seats in the back, one of the results of which was that the paying customers, the wealthier members of the parish were front and center. It was, unfortunately, also a devastating system, not only in terms of its elitism, but because it helped the church avoid the subject of money.

Let it be said that the pew rental system here, which ended essentially in 1960, had long since stopped being a major source of revenue.

In our recent sanctuary renovation project, someone came up with a variation on

the old theme which had us in stitches. Mr. McCasky was in the newspapers, arguing that sky boxes are the key to a successful football franchise, so why, the suggestion was made, why not build sky boxes all the around our galleries? They could have comfortable, swivel seats, discreet access for late arrivals or early departures, piped-in sound and TV for close-ups, and best of all, juice, coffee and bagels.

Now the problem will all of this is that our money, how we earn it and how we use it, is very close to the heart of each one of us and reflects our own sense of ourselves, our expression of the purpose and meaning of our lives. The market knows that about us. We buy our clothes, automobiles, wrist watches, and scotch to make a statement about who we are. And, how we use our money finally reflects our own singular truth, our own singular love.

Robert Wuthnow scolds ministers, not so much because in our avoidance of the topic we aren't efficient money-raisers, but because we are not speaking to challenging and helping our people with one of the most important areas of their lives. "Your people," he writes, "are much more concerned about how to work responsively and manage their money wisely than they are about the propriety or impropriety of a Robert Mapplethorp photograph." [Opinion, October 2, 1997, "Churches' Financial Woes: a Crisis of Spirit"]

So – this is Stewardship Sunday, the day when we hope to persuade one another to give enough money to pay all the bills next year and maybe even allow a few of our programs to grow. We have, for instance, made a new commitment to Christian education and youth ministry reflected in two part-time positions

becoming full-time Associate Pastors and we are looking for those two new people now. We are, for instance, continuing to expand our commitment to our neighbors and their children in educational outreach in a new scholarship program and in tuition supplementation in our Day Care Center. We hope to do more in Guatemala next year, and Cabrini. So yes, we need money. We get about a third of what we need from our endowment, which represents the faith and love of those who have gone before it. Two thirds of what we need comes from you. So, I invite you to give because this institution needs help – but also because I know – that you and I need to give, need to use our resources intentionally and faithfully, for the health of our own spirits.

And that, finally, brings us to the text for the day, Mark 10:32-45.

They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What is it that you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the

baptism that I am baptized with?" They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

"Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant."

One of the most amazing and successful missionary endeavors in the history of Christianity is the story of the Presbyterian Church in Korea. Presbyterian presence in Korea today is about the equivalent of the Roman Catholic Church's presence in our culture. It is huge. There are large Presbyterian Churches in every city and village. Some of the biggest churches in Seoul have 30,000, 40,000, 50,000 members. There are wonderful Presbyterian universities, hospitals, secondary schools and welfare agencies. The women of the Presbyterian Church Korea, long denied access to leadership, formed over the years, a church within a church with their own headquarters building and foreign mission program. Korean missionaries are all over South America and North America. I was astonished to find myself at a meeting last year with the Korean Presbyterian Presbytery in

Santiago, Chile. Every Presbyterian Church has on the steeple a red neon cross and at night, approaching a city or looking out a hotel window, one sees many red crosses in the night sky, an affirmation of the presence of the church and the gospel.

It began in 1885 when two missionaries – a Methodist and his wife, and a Presbyterian by the name of Underwood, arrived from Tokyo. Korean Methodists and Presbyterians argue about who arrived first. The Methodists claim that since Underwood was a Presbyterian and thus a gentleman, he must have deferred to the Methodist missionary's wife and allowed her to get off the boat first. Presbyterians remind the Methodists that their man was called back to Tokyo, so Underwood, who walked all the way to Seoul, was the first Protestant. Roman Catholic missionaries had been working in Korea for years.

When Presbyterians visit Korea, they always ask how did it happen? Why is Christianity so successful here? What are you doing that we aren't doing? We asked those questions to Don Ik Kim, pastor of the oldest Presbyterian Church, Underwood's church, and he told us that there were four periods of dramatic growth, each with a particular story.

Five years after Underwood arrived, Severance Presbyterian Hospital was delivering western health care in Seoul. And in 1890 there was an enormous cholera epidemic. Fifty thousand Koreans died, many of them simply abandoned in the streets because of the absence of health care facilities. Christians, Presbyterian members of that congregation, Sac-Moon-An Church, went into the streets and picked up the sick and dying and took them to the hospital or ministered to them. And the

government wondered and inquired, "Who are these people who care for the dying? Why do they do this?" The government, in the midst of the 1890 cholera epidemic, began referring to Christians as the "angels."

In 1910 the Japanese invaded and occupied Korea and the Presbyterian Church was involved in a huge public protest, and later, when the Japanese ruled that all public meetings, including Christian worship, must begin with a Shinto ceremony and Presbyterian pastors were imprisoned and executed for refusing, the church added 200,000 members.

In 1950 when the armies of the north invaded and the church provided social services and food and shelter, its membership doubled.

And in 1980 in the midst of a military dictatorship when the church once again stood with the people and Presbyterian leaders were publicly reprimanded and imprisoned, the church grew rapidly.

There is, apparently, a connection between the greatness of the Presbyterian Church in Korea, and its willingness to serve its country, its people, with courage and determination.

There is in the Korean story a direct relationship between greatness and service which is exactly what Jesus told his disciples one day. It's a wonderful story. An almost embarrassingly human and contemporary story and an occasion of one of the clearest articulations of the essence of Jesus' own faith, his sense of his own life, anywhere in the Bible.

They're on the road to Jerusalem. Three times he has tried to warn them that there will be suffering and persecution and quite possibly death when they arrive in Jerusalem. His friends are amazed and afraid, as well they should be. And it's precisely at this moment that James and John, two of his dearest and closest friends, come to him and instead of standing with him in his hour of trial, instead of trying somehow to encourage and support him as he walks toward his own hour of truth which he knows, increasingly, will be his hour of death, instead of compassion and kindness and elemental human decency, they use the moment to ask for a favor.

They still think this is going to come out all right. They still think his arrival in Jerusalem will result in something good – like his becoming the king, the leader, number one in

Israel. And when it happens, whatever it is, they, James and John, would very much like to be at his right hand and left hand in positions of power and prestige and visible greatness.

It had to have been one of the most devastating experiences in his life. Where have they been? Haven't they seen and heard a thing? Did they completely miss the point when he put the little child in their midst, or told the rich man to sell his possessions? Were they deaf and blind?

It's so embarrassing that Matthew softens it a bit for us by having their mother ask the question. But Mark writes first and so it must have been James and John who ask it. Jesus does not scold them. In fact, there is a very interesting sense in which he accepts and even affirms their question and what lies behind it – their ambition, their desire for greatness.

They simply have the definitions wrong. It's all right to want to be great. But greatness is not what you think. It's not about sitting at the right and left hand of the king. It's not about having lots of money or even lots of professional success. In God's kingdom, which Jesus believes is now the operational reality in the world, greatness is measured by service. "Whoever wants to be great must be the servant of all."

That's a bit of a jolt, isn't it? In an obvious way it challenges a basic, foundational rubric of the culture–market in which you and I live and work and earn and spend. Greatness is bigness. Greatness is political power, corporate success, a big salary, a big batting average. It shapes the way we think and live. It results in our brightest and best, no longer going into teaching, social work, ministry, even

law and medicine. Our best today are in business, economics, management. The text challenges the culture to find ways to heal itself: to celebrate the teacher, for instance; the young woman or man who consciously chooses to limit her or his financial future in order to teach children. Or the social worker, or police officer, or the nurse or physical therapist. Jesus would call them great. Or – and this is the critical point – the man or woman who has achieved a measure of this world's greatness with its rewards and then finds a way to invest it, give it, use it for the service of one's fellow human beings.

And the text is a jolt to the way we think theologically. Lamar Williamson puts it beautifully. The text challenges "any simplistic, self-centered understanding of discipleship. Getting right with God by coming to Jesus is not simply a basic factor in an ordered life.

Discipleship will mean more trouble, not less ... Jesus is likely to be disruptive." [Interpretation, Mark, p. 195]

It means that at a basic level, religious institutions are great, not because of their beautiful architecture, or robust budgets, or growing membership roles, but because of the service they provide to their neighbors, the world, their communities, the needy all around them. It means that the purpose of the endeavor is not merely to assure us that we are the objects of God's unconditional love, but to teach us to live our lives fully by expressing that same love to others.

It means that the purpose for the whole enterprise: your being here this morning instead of somewhere else; this church being here instead of Nordstrom's – is to advocate for greatness – a new greatness based not on

wealth, power, success, bottom line, influence, but very simply, on the people who are served, helped, loved, affirmed.

When Mother Teresa died, I went to my shelves to find and reread a little book entitled Something Beautiful for God. It's about Mother Teresa and it was written by Malcolm Muggeridge, British journalist, intellectual gadfly and long time editor of Punch Magazine. Muggeridge was sent to Calcutta by the BBC to do a TV special on an Albanian nun whose ministry was picking up the wretched dying from the streets of the city and taking care of them in the hospice she had established.

Muggeridge, a skeptic theologically, who had very little good to say about religion generally, was swept off his feet. He observed the simple rituals of the Sisters of Charity which Mother Teresa founded and headed: how, after

morning prayers they went to work on the streets and in their orphanage and hospice. He listened in awe as she told about her simple purpose, to "bring the dying within view of a loving face" and how she told him that "it is being unwanted that is the worst disease that any human being can experience." Muggeridge chuckled as she told him that the Indian government had given her a free rail pass but what she really wanted was a free airline pass to visit her many convents and when she was refused, how she offered to work as an airline stewardess in exchange for one – a prospect Muggeridge called "delectable" and I do too.

Muggeridge observed how effectively Mother Teresa communicated the claims of Christians without preaching: that people know and understand the truth by seeing it lived, in the same way, apparently, that crowds of people were enchanted by Jesus because what

he said and did was not austere, rigid, judgmental religion, but love lived out by accepting, affirming, touching, and loving all who came within its magnetic pull.

And Muggeridge observed one thing more – her joyfulness, her happiness, in the midst of what for any of us would be unimaginable austerity, poverty, filth, stench, uninterrupted suffering – a community of remarkably and profoundly joyful women.

He wrote, "There is much talk today about discovering an identity, as though it were something to be looked for, like a winning number in the lottery; then, once found, to be hoarded and treasured. Actually, in a sort of Keynsian principle, the more it is spent, the richer it becomes. So, with Mother Teresa, in effacing herself, she becomes herself. I never met anyone more memorable." [p. 16]

When she died the whole world paused and, I believe, took stock for a moment. And in the midst of the state military funeral India provided, saw with momentary clarity the truth that Jesus taught and that Jesus was – namely that true greatness is in becoming a servant.

This incident concludes with Jesus reflecting out loud on his own life. "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus forever changed, in that one sentence, the way we think about God and religion. It is the nature of God to serve, to give, to empty self for others.

That was so radical, his contemporaries could barely hear it. They believed God was most like a holy judge whose concerns for the

human race were to make sure the law was obeyed and standards of purity and cleanness were maintained. Their religion was a system by which God's holiness and human purity were celebrated and protected.

And here is this man, this unforgettable man with his radical ideas that God is far more concerned about compassion and service than about ritual purity: far more interested in service than in religious power and prestige. And then he goes about living it – healing, accepting, reaching out, welcoming the children, the old ones, the sick and lame and blind and diseased, the unclean, the taboo, the socially rejected -- and keeps on living it on the road to and then dramatically in the heart of his nation – his people, and then incredibly, keeps pouring himself out, until on a Friday afternoon he dies – so that a few years later one of his followers will write

Let the same mind be in you that was
in Christ Jesus.

Who emptied himself
taking the form of a slave.

Therefore God also highly exalted
him.

Let the same mind be in you – that's you and me – loved by the Lord, ransomed, set free from whatever about us or about our world inhibits us, restrains us, chains us to lesser goals and aspirations and challenges us to become great men and women.

Who, in our better moments, God-given moments, know that it is in service to others, to those who need our love, our strength, our help; that it is in emptying ourselves that we become

ourselves: that in our service is our true and only greatness.

Malcolm Muggeridge tells an entrancing, fascinating story of filming Mother Teresa in her convent. It was in the late afternoon. The cameraman insisted that it was too dark to film. A heated discussion ensued. Muggeridge convinced him to give it a try even though everyone knew there simply wasn't enough light. When the film was processed, Mother Teresa and her convent was "bathed in a particularly beautiful soft light, like the kindly light in the old hymn." "This love is luminous," he wrote, like the haloes artists have seen and made visible around the heads of the saints." [p. 44]

Well, maybe. But what I know is true, with everything in me, is that God is love and God's will for you and me is that we know that love

and live out the rest of our days rejoicing in that love and sharing it, passing it around, among those who need it – and in the process discovering that we are having a great time, that we are doing great things, that we have become, because he said, great in our service, great in our love, great in our generosity.

Amen.

CHURCH MATTERS

"What's it like being Moderator?" my son asked me. I had to say, "It's great. You travel around to interesting places and every time you walk into a room, people stand up and clap for you.

It's a nice custom. I'm trying to encourage it at home – in my office and with my family . . . but it's not going over well there.

I know what it means and I am grateful.

It means you have deep loyalty, affection – and love for this church of ours – and that, I think, is very important these days.

Because if all you know about the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are criticisms of laymen and GAC response everyone agrees the church is in trouble.

In the August edition of the Atlantic Monthly, there is a major article everybody is reading on *The Next Church.* The church of the future. It's about the new, huge mega churches . . . churches with membership in the tens of thousands, with enormous professional staffs, churches that work very hard not to look and feel like traditional churches: hymns are "songs," sermons are "messages," overhead projectors instead of hymnals, light rock instead of Bach, synthesizers instead of pipe organs. Building complexes which are referred to as campuses and which resemble shopping

For Muskegon – et. al

K Norris – CC 9/24–10/1 (Drawing on Metaphor)

"In our ideological age, making room, especially for those who disagree with us, is a dangerous thing to do."

UNITY

Let's make room.

Let's stop demonizing
Church is hurting down + we know who the assholes are

– naming names – we don't do that

ART ROSS – OUTLOOK
Further Union – Deeper Communion
in Word Communion

TS Eliot Four Quartets

Love is most nearly itself
Where here + now cease to matter.
Old men ought to be explorers
Here + now does not matter
We must be still + moving
Into another intensity
For a further union, a deeper communion
Through the dark cold + empty
desolation,
The wave cry, the wind cry, the
vast waters
Of the petrel + the porpoise. In my
end is my beginning

10

MARTY - Schuyman's Perception

(1) ~~Study~~ P 121 Marty's principles

(2) not family, or community, but civil association civil association

PC(USA) - journals that treat — act fabric by judicial — our journals
Pres. Bu Sil & Bus Layman

(3) Republic - ~~argument~~ | Am. A/B
P 164 - Many interests, ~~of~~ & subs gistion. must encourage argument.

(4) Republic requires argument

Conclusion -

"We might explore ways in which practical intelligence could be of use to churches that seem to be in danger of becoming just one more place in our society where people become polarized over political issues

MODERATOR'S REPORT
209TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
JUNE 14, 1997

This is an extraordinary church. I have loved it all my life and after a year of service as Moderator, visiting its congregations, presbyteries, synods, GA Mission programs in this country and abroad, its colleges and seminaries and networks, I love it even more. And I am happy to report to you that in spite of what you might read about us in the press - or in the newspapers printed by various parts of our own family who want us to be different and who hold us up for criticism, in spite of that, I'm happy to report that we are a strong and vital and creative and mission minded and faithful church of Jesus Christ and that there is much about which to be hopeful and positive and deeply grateful. And if that is news to you, you might want to try reading a different newspaper, or at least expanding your horizons a little bit. May I suggest the brand new Presbyterians, "Being Faithful to Jesus Christ" which we are introducing at this Assembly, and which you may receive in your home, four times a year, and which will tell you every three months, good news about your Church.

Thank you for the honor of serving as Moderator of the General Assembly. It has been a great privilege, an exciting and exhausting adventure and I shall never forget it.

My heart is full of gratitude to Moderators who have preceded me and shown me how to do it. I think particularly of Bill Laws who, in 1970, led us with grace, fairness and conviction in stressful times.

And I want to thank the people with whom I have been privileged to work:

- Gay Mothershed, our gracious Vice Moderator.
- The General Assembly staff at the Presbyterian Center in Louisville, particularly Valerie Small and Diane Dulaney.
- Cliff Kirkpatrick,our distinguished Stated Clerk,and personal friend.
- Frank Diaz and Youngil Cho who have led this year with stability and courage.
- Executives of Board of Pensions, Foundation, PILP, Publishing Corporation, who have established a new style of collaboration and cooperative leadership.
- The General Assembly Senior Staff , Eunice, Curtis, Gwen and Bob, who serve our church with great dedication.
- The Commissioners to the 208th General Assembly who elected me;
- The people of Fourth Presbyterian Church who allowed me to be away and supported me with encouragement and prayers, and who have thrived this year without me.
- My circle of friends from Chicago, Columbus, and Altoona, PA, who have been with us all year and have come to be with us today.
- Sue, my wife, my children and son-in-law, daughter-in-law, grandchildren, whose love and support sustained me all year long.

I have been pleasantly surprised, every single day at how much affection and pride Presbyterian people have for their church. The Moderator receives it every time people rise and

applaud. But all Moderators know that the affection is not for us personally, but for the office and what it symbolizes: the history, unity and mission of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

I have received a lot of mail: much of it expressing anger, pain, concern about the issue which has dominated our life this year. But, also encouraging letters, letters expressing the hope and love of Presbyterian people.

This one arrived on December 15th:

"Dear Mr. Moderator,

When things get frustrating and discouraging, please remember that people you don't even know are earnestly praying for you and for our church. What a cloud of witnesses!

May God give you grace, strength and wisdom for your office.

In Christ,

Jim Gooch and the Session of Westminster Presbyterian Church, Corsicana, Texas"

Presbyterian congregations are worshipping faithfully, baptizing their infants, teaching the children, standing with their young people, learning and growing in faith and engaging in mission where they are with unique faithfulness. Presbyterian congregations are feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, counseling the disturbed, advocating for the oppressed every where.

And they are doing it with consistent joy from Fifth Avenue Church in Manhattan to John Knox Church in a racially mixed neighborhood in Los Angeles, from First Church downtown Atlanta to Community Presbyterian Church, Millwood, Washington.

At our best we Presbyterians have a twinkle in our eye. It's theological for us. We know about grace, we know that none of us deserves to get into the kingdom. We're in because God has invited us in – so there is an element of joyful playfulness at the heart of the enterprise at our best.

At San Rafael, California, Norm Pott used me as a prop in his children's sermon. He told about the cross and invited the children to give the Moderator a "high-five" and then not wash their hands for the rest of the day.

Fairlington Presbyterian Church, Alexandria, Virginia, invited me to preach for the church's 50th Anniversary. Now the Moderator receives many more Sunday invitations than he/she can accommodate, so difficult decisions must be made. Sometimes the invitations are creative in order to influence the decision making process. Fairlington's, for instance, was three pages long, and said "Mr. Moderator, believing like you do that "church matters," we, the congregation of the Fairlington Presbyterian Church hope and pray you will honor our request and come and speak to our congregation." Attached was a petition signed by 108 members of the

church. Well, who could resist that? Jan Edmiston and Fred Lyons are co-pastors and as Jan was introducing me in worship she said. "Mr. Moderator we have a confession to make. You know that petition with all the names on it? Well, if you looked closely you'll see that the handwriting is very similar for many of them. After we sent it I was looking at a copy of it and I noticed that. I noticed that there were names on that list of people I know were out of town on the Sunday we passed it around. And then I noticed names of people who used to be members but have moved. And then I noticed the names of a few members of Fairlington Presbyterian Church whose funerals I've had recently. I was horrified. I called the Elder in charge and she said, "yes, as a matter of fact, we didn't get many signatures – so the committee signed for people we thought might like a moderator visit... Same for the ones who died. We chose the ones we thought might like it. Besides the Moderator's from Chicago, he'll understand that. That's how they elect alderman, isn't it?"

I have visited 72 of our Presbyteries and even though we love to complain about Presbytery meetings, I'm pleased to report to you that our Presbyteries are functioning effectively and nurturing community. I traveled to the Presbytery of South Dakota in the dead of winter, the tiny plane circled the field several times before deciding to land on the snow packed runway. On the ground I discovered a Presbytery of 70 congregations, mostly small, scattered all over the state – and those commissioners were happy to be together. We had a great roast beef dinner for the occasion. I'm not sure they weren't pulling my leg a little but they told me our dinner was walking around in the pasture earlier that same day. While I was there, the Executive Presbyter Richard Melin told me what the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) means to the people of South Dakota. It was a rough winter with huge, disastrous snow accumulation. 100,000 cattle died in South Dakota, many small ranches went bankrupt. Almost all ranches lost fences, barns, heavy equipment. Snow is a benign disaster, Rick explained. It looks pretty, but people here are desperate and alone. And grateful for an immediate grant from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), One Great Hour of Sharing to start the relief process and for the 20 Presbytery volunteers from the Synod of the Trinity who traveled to South Dakota to help rebuild.

I am happy to report to you the health and vitality of our seminaries – I've visited and spoke with students at every one of them. Our community of scholars is one of our most precious treasures. Our Presidents and faculties care deeply about the church and their role in educating leadership for the future.

Our colleges and universities are asking the critical question of how they can maintain a more important and closer relationship with the church and I am greatly encouraged that there is a new day for our ministry in higher education.

And New Church Development, we know the New Church Development is the strategy which will allow us to obey our Lord's mandate and at the same time to take seriously our membership loss. We're thinking about NCD, and we're doing it, and we need more - more plans, strategies and resources

We are an old church. I've brought the greetings of the whole church to congregations celebrating anniversaries - 50th, 100th, 200th, 250th, 300th. We have congregations on islands off the coast of South Carolina that are almost 325 years old. This is the 209th General Assembly, but we were here a century before that. Our Presbyterian Scots-Irish ancestors were among the first settlers in the new world and they brought with them their Calvinist suspicion of authority and hierarchies and monarchies and their insistence that individuals have God given rights and responsibilities for their governance. They provided the philosophic/theological rationale for revolution, so much so that William Pitt, on the floor of parliament, referred to the skirmishes at Lexington and Concord as that "Presbyterian Revolt."

After Independence was won, we Presbyterians helped to write a constitution and build a nation and because our theology is Reformed we expressed ourselves on all the matters of concern in the society and brought into our courts and meetings and worship services the issues that were vexing and troubling and sometimes dividing the nation: slavery, war, economics, poverty, race.

We are an old church.

And we are a big church. There are still 2.7 million of us. And the polls indicate that perhaps twice that number think of themselves as Presbyterians. There are 11,400 congregations, 68 colleges and universities and we are in mission in 87 countries.

And we are a distinguished Missionary church. Presbyterian mission activity began in the middle of the last century. Presbyterian missionaries were often on the field first and always with their Reformed concern for evangelism and social justice, establishing churches but also everywhere schools, colleges, hospitals.

The Moderator brings greetings and encouragement to our Mission personnel and our mission partners on behalf of the General Assembly and so we were privileged this year on your behalf to visit:

- The Presbyterian Reformed Church of Cuba
- The Presbyterian Churches in Brazil, Chile and Argentina
- The Waldensians in Rome
- The Vatican Secretariat for Ecumenical Relations, bringing greetings to Pope John Paul II
- The Reformed Church of Hungary
- The Reformed Church of Croatia
- The Presbyterian Church of Korea and the Korean Presbyterian Church

Because of the faithful and courageous witness of missionaries 100 years ago there are today thriving indigenous, partner Presbyterian Churches all over the world.

There are more Presbyterians in Kenya than there are in our nation.

There are strong Presbyterian Churches and hospitals in the new Republic of the Congo and the Sudan.

In Cuba – our Presbyterian partners are now free to live as a church in a new way with amazing results. Churches are full – bursting at the seams. The Seminary at Matanzas is full of bright, committed young students and the new President, Ofelia Ortega, will be our preacher Tuesday night at the Ecumenical Worship Service.

In Brazil – the dynamic Presbyterian Churches are moving toward reunion as they are in Chile – a development that will greatly enhance their evangelical witness in those two critically important nations.

In Argentina, a group of 15 wonderful young Presbyterian young adult Volunteers in Mission traveled, some for hundreds of miles, to meet with the Moderator and to hear a word from home. They live on a shoe string so I bought their dinner - I hope you approve.

In Croatia we spent time with our mission workers in Osijek, a beautiful old city that sustained serious damage in the recent war. We support a seminary in Osijek and Agape, a refugee resettlement project. We visited a feeding center – the refugee problem in Croatia is horrendous. Osijek is flooded with Bosnian Muslim refugees, Serbians, and Croatian Catholics, Orthodox and Muslims, all of whom have suffered ethnic cleansing, destruction of homes and entire villages, and who have literally no where to go. At the feeding center I met the workers and the people lined up to receive a loaf of bread and a bowl of soup ladled into whatever container they brought: jars, cans, pots and pans, even a scrub bucket. A little self-consciously, I ladled soup for a while and then as we left a Muslim woman asked who we were. Our translator told her we were Presbyterians from the U.S.A. She took my hands in hers and with tears flowing freely she told the translator to tell me that her husband and sons were executed – ethnic cleansing. Her daughter was raped and disappeared. Her home was destroyed, she had nothing. "Tell them – I thank God for them", she said. "Tell them that without this help, this food we would starve."

On Sunday I was invited to preach at the Reformed Church of Vincovsci where the Bishop of the Reformed Church of Croatia, Endre Langh is Pastor. That little church sustained a direct mortar hit in the bombardments that virtually destroyed most of the public buildings in Vincovsci: hospital, museum, schools, the Roman Catholic Cathedral was leveled. So the Orthodox Cathedral was blown up in retribution. The little Reformed Church was hit too, the people had evacuated. But now they are back. A grant from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has helped repair the building, a small sanctuary and attached manse. On the Sunday after Easter the church was crowded with men, women and children to see and say thank you to the American Moderator. What an experience, to be in that tiny pulpit one week after standing in the high Gothic pulpit of the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago – totally safe – in the midst of the secure comfort and affluence we take so for granted – and to preach about the hope of the

resurrection and to assist Bishop Langh by breaking and serving the bread of communion and see the tears in the eyes of our Croatian brothers and sisters, tears of gratitude for the church and for the hope of the Gospel.

In Korea I brought your greetings to congregations, colleges, seminaries, denominations, staff members, and at the end of a 1,000 meter tunnel, 75 yards underground, beneath the DMZ at the 38th Parallel, to the surprised South Korean sergeant on guard. The Presbyterian story in Korea is amazing and all of us were deeply grateful for the strength and faithfulness of the Presbyterian church and the courage of our missionaries who arrived there in 1888. Our General Assembly staff has been to North Korea where a major crisis is occurring before our eyes. But there are, we know, 500 Presbyterian congregations in North Korea, all but two functioning without a building, meeting in homes – South Korean Presbyterians have family members in those churches who they have not seen for 47 years. They pray for reunification. They help, in every way they can think of to send food and desperately needed supplies. If there is hope for a peaceful future in North Korea it is in part because of the church that transcends the 38th Parallel.

We are an old church and a big church and a distinguished mission church. We are a diverse church and we are, all the world knows, a church deeply divided over an issue which is very clear to some of us, and for many of us very complex. When the vote on Amendment B was taken on Friday of the 208th General Assembly, I knew that in the Spring of 1997 the Presbyteries would vote and there was coming a day when a significant part of this wonderful family was going to be deeply disappointed, hurt, angry, and wondering whether or not there was any longer a place for them in the family. I knew that it would be painful – because I have good and trusted friends on both sides of this issue. We did not know, of course, which side was going to be happy and which would be unhappy: only that someone was going to be very disappointed.

I am glad to report that the conversation throughout our family went well. We can be grateful for the respect, civility, courtesy and love which characterized the Amendment B debate in our Presbyteries. We did something important, I believe, in the way we talked with one another.

And now, you are the General Assembly which inherits the process and the decision.

I will tell you that I have heard from a lot of people about this issue. I have received every day for the past three months, long and painful letters, from faithful, life long Presbyterians announcing their resignation from the church, from gay and lesbian Presbyterian elders, deacons, trustees, church members, Sunday school teachers, letters from parents of gay and lesbian Presbyterians who cannot believe what our church has done to their children, and want me to explain. I have heard from people representing one side of the debate who are furious with me for not condemning the decision and giving public voice to my personal opposition.

And I have heard from people asking me to lead the implementation and enforcement of Amendment B, furious because I have said that "enforcement" is the wrong word and wrong

concept: very angry because I said that there are many churches which will have a very difficult time changing their behavior, which has historically been more inclusive than this provision allows, my own among them.

And in the midst of it all I have heard many, many voices – worried, fearful – saying please, please God, let's not divide or destroy this church. I have heard voices on both sides saying we do not intend witch hunts or mass resignations, we do not intend to turn our beloved church into a battle field of acrimony, accusation and ecclesiastic litigation.

We need more of those voices now. The conversation will go on. Some believe it is resolved. It is not. It is not resolved in the congregation I serve. We must, I humbly suggest, like it or not, continue the conversation. Churches and individuals who cannot implement Amendment B, must work to change it. Churches and individuals who rejoice over its passage must help churches and individuals who must out of conscience and conviction and theology and Biblical authority, disagree and dissent.

I hope that somehow in the next week, you will find a way to move us ahead. Seventy years ago, when the church was almost coming apart over the Modernist/Fundamentalist debate, the General Assembly created a commission to consider all the implications of the action and to preserve the unity of the church. Perhaps we need such a commission now.

What we need, I know, is God's spirit; the gentle, reconciling Holy Spirit. What we need, I know is one another. What we need is Presbyterian Christians with enough grace in their hearts to reach across the gaps and fissures and divides in this great church and hold on to one another for dear life.

That Commission, back in 1925, produced a report which I have read and reread carefully. In that report they said some important things about who we are as a people. Let me read a few sentences to you. They have encouraged and inspired me during this year.

> "Presbyterianism is a great body of belief, but it is more than a belief; it is also a tradition, a controlling sentiment. The ties that bring us to it are not of the mind only; they are ties of the heart as well. There are people who, despite variant opinions, can never be at home in any other communion. They were born into the Presbyterian Church. They love its name, its order and its great distinctive teachings. In its fellowship they have a precious inheritance from their forbears. Their hearts bow at its altars and cherish a just pride in its noble history. Attitudes and sentiments like these are treasures which should not be undervalued hastily, not cast aside lightly."
>
> Special Commission of 1925
> Members 138th General Assembly (1926) p. 62-87

Commissioners to the 209th General Assembly, thank you for your service to our church. Help us see the way ahead. Cherish this precious church, its name, its order, its distinctive teachings, its fellowship, its ties of the heart.

There is so much for which to be grateful and hopeful. We stand together on the Common Ground of the Gospel, ground carefully and lovingly cultivated by those who have gone before us. We live in a household of faith carefully and lovingly constructed. May we be good stewards of the gift and may we at this Assembly and in the days ahead strengthen and cultivate and build and hand the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) whole, strong, faithful, to our children and our children's children.

Thank you for the privilege of allowing me to be your Moderator. Madam Vice Moderator, this is my report.

209TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Syracuse, New York
June 15, 1997

THAT WE MAY DWELL IN PERFECT UNITY

Matthew 16: 13-20
Ephesians 4: 1-6

John M. Buchanan
Pastor, Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago, Illinois

On the Sunday after I was ordained, June 1963, I was invited to preach in my home church, the Broad Avenue Presbyterian Church in Altoona, Pennsylvania.

I chose for my text the portion of scripture I had been assigned for my senior thesis, the most ambitious academic project I had ever tackled, or have ever since. My professor and thesis advisor was Marcus Barth. I waded through everything anyone ever wrote about that text in antiquity and modernity. I knew the passage in Greek as I have not known anything in Greek since. I explored the text from every perspective – linguistically, theologically, historically, socially, politically.

The text was Matthew 16:13-20, and what I did for that unsuspecting congregation, of course, was take my thesis, bristling with footnotes and scholarly citations and turn it into a sermon.

Fortunately, grace abounds. Everybody seemed pleased. I had not said anything heretical, insofar as anybody knew. I had used a lot of fancy new words, but the church would survive. My old junior high teacher, Magdalene Bair, who used to fill me with fear and trembling, shook my hand and said, "I see you are still talking too fast – and too much!"

There was a festive lunch in our home and afterward my parents and I were alone, finishing up our coffee and my father said one of the most important things anyone has ever said to me. He said, "You told us what everybody in history thought (about Jesus' question – 'who do you say that I am?). Next time you preach on that text," Dad said, "save some time at the end for what you think."

He was right, of course. What you and I think and believe about Jesus of Nazareth is the question. Our belief in him, our trust in him, our commitment to follow him, our obedience to him is what allows us to call ourselves Christians.

The church's affirmation of his Lordship is at the heart of our identity. Jesus Christ is what we are about. Jesus Christ is our truth, our peace; Jesus Christ is all we have to offer one another and the world. Jesus Christ matters, above all else.

Paul tries scolding the Corinthians; tells them there is a better way to be Christian, in fact, a better way to be human. It's the way of love. But the older Paul becomes, the wiser and more mature, and the more he ponders the unfathomable mystery of God's grace in Jesus Christ ... the bigger and broader his vision of the church becomes.

Near the end of his life, in a Roman jail cell, he writes to the church in Ephesus and now his emphasis is focusing on the unity of that church, the reconciliation between its Jewish and Gentile members. And, get this – the unity of that church would demonstrate to the world the truth of what God had done in Jesus Christ and continued to do in the world through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Is there a more passionate plea than this –

> "I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you are called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Ephesians 4:1-3

Is there a more passionate –or relevant – plea in scripture?

You see, Paul's thought has lately taken wing. Now he believes that in Jesus Christ God has started a new creation, a new humanity. In Christ, God – with a plan before the ages – intends to heal divisions, break down walls of hostility, unite all things. Paul soars as he sits in that miserable jail cell. "He is our peace." he says about Jesus. God's purpose is to bring together the human race, tribes, nations, slaves, free, women, men.

All the scholars agree – whoever wrote this thinks that the church is supposed to show the world what God's new creation looks like. Marcus Barth thinks it was, indeed, Paul and in his classic commentary on Ephesians, he says, about that wonderful admonition, "Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit", "It is hardly possible to render exactly the urgency contained in the underlying Greek verb. Not only haste and passion, but a full effort is meant, involving will, sentiment, reason, physical strength. Do it now! You are to do it. I mean it!" [Ephesians, M. Barth, Vol. II, p. 428]

Barth translated the critical phrase: "Take pains to maintain the unity of the spirit." It is painful, is it not? It is painful to maintain unity with people you know are wrong and obnoxious on top of it. It is – I propose – a lot more difficult to maintain the unity than to walk away, to destroy it.

Now, wait a minute. Are you proposing that belief in the church is of comparable weight with belief in Jesus Christ and, furthermore, that the church's unity is as important as my individual conclusions about this or that? About COCU or mission budgets, or Amendment B? That's exactly what I'm suggesting and I am convinced that's exactly what the Bible says.

Barth takes it a step further and says that "God's oneness is related directly, causatively, dynamically, effectively, to the unity of the church. Because God is one, God's people are one

Just a few weeks ago, I was being interviewed by a reporter from one of the major weekly news magazines about Amendment B. After trying everything he could think of to get me to say I thought our church was about to split, he finally said, with a little exasperation, "Look I've talked to both sides. I know what they're saying about each other. You're already two churches. So why don't you just call a meeting, hire a good lawyer, get a divorce, split up the property and move on?"

Bruce Bawer said the same thing in a New York Times Op Ed column on April 5: "American Protestantism is in the midst of a major shift. It is being split into two nearly antithetical religions, both calling themselves Christianity." The battle in the Presbyterian Church, he said, shows that we are already two churches: "a church of law and a church of love." And I was reminded of how many times this year Presbyterians have said to me and written to me long and passionate and sad letters saying, "I have to leave. I cannot stay any longer." I thought about how many people on one side said, "This is a deal breaker, a boundary issue. If this doesn't pass, I'm outa here." And how many now are saying, "I quit, this is it."

Does it matter? Does the unity of the church matter as much as my conscience, my convictions, my opinions which I increasingly believe are God's opinions as well? Yes, it matters. It matters because Paul was right – whether we like it or not – the church shows the world what God's new creation looks like. And if what we show the world is a fractured, broken fragmented mess, that, I believe, is a major failure, a very serious sin.

Beverly Gaventa says this lection should be painful reading for contemporary Christians. "The unity of the church is for its mission and its evangelical credulity." [Texts for Preaching, Year B, 1993]

Our unity is for our evangelical credibility. It doesn't take much experience with our Worldwide Ministries Division to understand the truth of that.

The Presbyterian Churches in Brazil, divided by theology, are moving deliberately closer to one another because they face an evangelical opportunity of enormous dimensions. And they will be more effective when they are one church again.

What is transpiring between Reformed and Lutheran churches here at this General Assembly is important for evangelical reasons.

Where Christianity confronts Islam, our unity is absolutely essential. Nothing ends the dialogue quicker, nothing, I am told, discredits the Gospel more effectively than bickering between Christians.

Peter Kuzmic is the President of Evangelical Seminary in Osijek, Croatia, where Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) mission workers Steve and Michele Kurtz are on the faculty. Peter, who is a Calvinist Pentecostal and one of the leading Missiologists in the world, teaches that missionary effectiveness depends on authenticity and that there is no authenticity in mission that does not reflect not only Christian unity, but that deeper, magnificent new creation, new humanity St. Paul

– even when we do not know it or want it. It is a sign this morning of the oneness Jesus Christ gives to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) – all of it – the Presbyterian Lay Committee and Semper Reformada, PFR & PLGC, The Witherspoon Society, Voices of Sophia, Elders at Prayer, The Coalition, Presbyterians Pro-Life and PARO. It is a holy communion because none of us earned our way onto the invitation list. Someone noted recently, we don't get to invite people to this table. God does. Nor do we get to exclude any God invites. Our business is our own table manners.

In a novel, The Clowns of God, Morris West portrays the return of Christ in which he holds a Down Syndrome child, serving her the bread and wine of communion, saying,

> "I gave this mite a gift I denied to all of you – eternal innocence. She will never offend me as all of you have done. She will never pervert or destroy the works of my father's hands. She is necessary to you. She will evoke the kindness that will keep you human. She will remind you every day that "I AM WHO I AM."
> [Diane M. Komp, Theology Today, *Hearts Untroubled,* Vol. 45, p. 273-279]

John Calvin was not hesitant to speak his mind, nor was he particularly easy to get along with in academic, theological debate. But he did understand the evangelical importance of our oneness. "I would cross seven oceans," he wrote, "to advance the cause of Christian unity."

And attributed to him are, I think, some of the loveliest words ever written and most important. They are in the fourth verse of the hymn with which we began. May they be our prayer.

> "Thou hast the true and perfect gentleness
> No harshness hast thou and no bitterness
> O grant to us the grace we find in thee
> That we may dwell in perfect unity.

Amen